

Fluoride

How does fluoride work?

When the element fluoride is used in small amounts on a routine basis it helps to prevent tooth decay. It encourages "remineralization," a strengthening of weak areas on the teeth. These spots are the beginning of cavity formation. Fluoride occurs naturally in water and in many different foods, as well as in dental products such as toothpaste, mouth rinses, gels, varnish and supplements. Fluoride is effective when combined with a healthy diet and good oral hygiene.

Will my child need fluoride supplements?

Children between the ages of six months and 16 years may require fluoride supplements. The pediatric dentist considers many different factors before recommending a fluoride supplement. Your child's age, risk of developing dental decay and the different liquids your child drinks are important considerations. Bottled, filtered and well waters vary in their fluoride amount, so a water analysis may be necessary to ensure your child is receiving the proper amount.

What type of toothpaste should my child use?

Your child should use toothpaste with fluoride and the American Dental Association *Seal of Acceptance*. Young children, especially pre-school aged children, should not swallow any toothpaste. Careful supervision and only a small pea-sized amount on the brush are recommended. If not monitored, children may easily swallow over four times the recommended daily amount of fluoride in toothpaste.

How safe is fluoride?

Fluoride is documented to be safe and highly effective. Research indicates water fluoridation, the most cost effective method, has decreased the decay rate by over 50 percent. Only small amounts of fluoride are necessary for the maximum benefit. Proper toothpaste amount must be supervised, and other forms of fluoride supplementations must be carefully monitored in order to prevent a potential overdose and unsightly spots on the developing permanent teeth. Do not leave toothpaste tubes where young children can reach them. The flavors that help encourage them to brush may also encourage them to eat toothpaste.

What is topical fluoride?

Topical fluoride comes in a number of different forms. Gels and foams are placed in fluoride trays and applied at the dental office after your child's teeth have been thoroughly cleaned. Fluoride varnish is one of the newer forms of topical fluoride applied at the dentist office. It has been documented to be safe and effective to fight dental decay through a long history of use in Europe.

The advantages of varnish are:

- Easily and quickly applied to the teeth.
- Decreases the potential amount of fluoride digested.
- Continues to "soak" fluoride into the enamel for approximately 24 hours after the original application.

This method is especially useful in young patients and those with special needs that may not tolerate fluoride trays comfortably.

Children who benefit the most from fluoride are those at highest risk for dental decay. Risk factors include a history of decay, high sucrose carbohydrate diet, orthodontic appliances and certain medical conditions such as dry mouth.

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